Radical Schiller and the Young Marx

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Abstract

This chapter reads Marx's early writings through the lens of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* and vice versa. It deploys Schiller's letters to delineate a powerful strand of aesthetic logic within Marx's developing theory of revolution and the state. At the same time, seen retrospectively from the viewpoint of the early Marx, it reconstructs a radical 'red thread' that runs throughout Schiller's theory of the aesthetic. Unlike those 'aesthetic' readings of the young Marx that focus on the importance of the senses and alienation, however, this chapter understands the 'aesthetic' in an expanded sense as an immanent modality of hegemony; art, beauty and "aesthetic culture" are thus conceived as moments within a more expansive aesthetic process. By placing Marx's reflections on journalistic style in the context of emerging individualist theories of style and eighteenth-century copyright debates, and by connecting his articles on wood-theft to a Schillerian theory of hegemony, the chapter shows that Marx's aesthetic reflections were an ongoing and constitutive feature of his political and economic thought.

Radical Schiller and the Young Marx

In *Machiavelli and Us* Althusser sought to solve the following "mystery": To whom is *The Prince* addressed?[1] Empirically, of course, *The Prince* was dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, but does he remain its only addressee? Althusser demonstrates in a quite startling manner just how central to the book's continued – and literal – appeal this question remains. Having spoken to Hegel in the present tense and Gramsci in the future, *The Prince*'s sustained interpellative power arises, suggests Althusser, from its inscription of a "dual place or space": the place of the subject of political practice and the place of the text which politically deploys or stages this political practice" (Althusser, 1999, 22). The former is the place produced by a conjunctural analysis that transforms situational elements into relations of force, calling upon an agent (the Prince) to intervene to resolve the "problem" of the conjuncture (18–20); the latter is the place of the text itself: the text (*The Prince*) which performs the conjunctural analysis becomes one of the active elements within the conjuncture itself. This double inscription is further complicated by the discrepancy between the place of the political viewpoint from which *The Prince* is written (that of the people) and the place of the political force it calls upon to act (the Prince) (26). This redoubled duality transforms traditional theoretical discourse into a singular conjunctural interpellation whose hail echoes across the centuries.

Perhaps one might say the same of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Ostensibly a series of real letters, Schiller included the following note in the original *Die Horen* publication of 1795: "These letters have really been written; but to *whom* is here of no relevance, and will perhaps in time be made known to the reader" (Schiller, 2016, 1). Empirically, we know that Schiller wrote at least seven letters to his patron, the Danish Prince von Augustenburg, but in February 1794 these were destroyed in a fire at the Copenhagen palace.

[1] I am grateful to Hammam Aldouri, Samir Gandesha and Johan Hartle for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. All remaining errors are my own.

The letters which ultimately appeared in *Die Horen* were based on Augustenburg's requested replacements, which were reformulated and expanded versions of the originals (Beiser, 2005, 121). Of those that survived the flames, two remarks concerning the mode and recipients of Schiller's address stand out. Firstly, Schiller overtly requested that he be allowed to develop his

> ideas on the philosophy of the beautiful … in a series of individual letters addressed to you [Augustenburg], and which I could then lay before the public. This freer form would lend their presentation more individuality and life; and the idea that I addressed you, and was judged by you, would give me a greater interest in my material. (2016, 117)

The epistolary form is thus an integral component of Schiller's theory of the aesthetic. Like the aesthetic, the letter form mediates between life and form (the objects of the material and formal impulses respectively); it is receptive to the empirical vitality, variability and individuality of life, yet the (literal) nobility of judgement and reason provide it with an internal rational restraint.[2] The letter form performs the aesthetic.

Equally significant is Schiller's awareness of his two addressees: the individual letters to Prince von Augustenburg will be "[laid] before the public." Just as the letter form mediates between life and form, so each line is written, at one and the same time, for the particular eyes of a Danish Prince and the abstract gaze of a universal mankind. In a formulation uncannily similar to Machiavelli's dedicatory note to Lorenzo de' Medici written three hundred years earlier,[3] Schiller writes in a letter of 13th July, 1793:

> A conversation about such matters would have all the greater attraction for me the more that the position from which *I*, a private person [*der*

[2] In the published version, Schiller refines this point: "What I had intended to ask of you as a favour you have generously made a duty, leaving me the appearance of merit when I am merely following my inclination" (2016, 3). The fusion of duty and inclination is integral to the aesthetic.

[3] "For those who draw maps place themselves on low ground, in order to understand the character of the mountains and other high points, and climb higher in order to understand the character of the plains. Likewise, one needs to be a ruler to understand properly the character of the people, and to be a man of the people to understand properly the character of rulers" (Machiavelli, 1988, 4).

> *Privatmann*], regard the political world differs from that from which *you*, a prince and a ruling statesman, look down into the flow of events. What could be more delightful than to meet each other in the *way of thinking* just where external *relationships* bring about the greatest distance, converging on the same midpoint in the world of ideas from such an immeasurable distance in the actual world? (Schiller, 2016, 122; emphasis in original)

Superficially, the sycophantic tone of address would support the now familiar argument that the aesthetic is precisely a substitute for radical social transformation – that is, one in which the social distinction of prince and private person is overcome in thought or beauty but not in practice. Yet this would be to underestimate the radical potential of Schiller's theory, that which *in* Schiller goes *beyond* Schiller. Just as for Machiavelli there can be no knowledge of rulers except from the viewpoint of the people, so for Schiller there can be no theory or practice of the aesthetic that does not seek out the "midpoint" between ruler and ruled, state and private person.

The precise political configuration of this "midpoint" is, however, ambiguous. Schiller's letters are philosophically and politically overdetermined, giving rise to a range of interpretations. Seen by Heidegger as "the first great retaliation against the French Revolution" (cited in Hartle 2009, 240) and more recently by Terry Eagleton (1990) as setting forth an ideological case for rule by consensus, one line of inheritance reads Schiller's text as a proponent of reformist anti-Jacobinism. Alternatively, at the high-point of the German workers' movement, Schiller was read by figures such as Franz Mehring as a thinker of the Left (Hartle 2009, 250, n. 35). More recently, Jacques Rancière has done much to make Schiller our renewed contemporary by locating in the paradoxes of the aesthetic a new artistic regime which initiates a democratic logic of the sensible (Rancière 2010, 115-133). Alongside Rancière's theoretical intervention, Schiller has also been read as an inheritor and expander of the modern republican tradition of Machiavelli, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Ferguson (Beiser 2005; Moggach 2007). The sheer range of political interpretations to which Schiller's letters seem to lend themselves would

suggest that the text is not only politically and historically overdetermined, but structurally ambiguous.

This ambiguity consists of two principal moments. Firstly, philosophical concepts constantly function in Schiller's letters as allegorical figurations of social classes, such that the opposition of form and matter is always implicitly mediated by the opposition between rulers and workers. The effect is to produce constant subtle but confusing shifts in scale between psychology and statecraft. Secondly, and more importantly, the letters seem to employ four closely related yet ultimately distinct and occasionally mutually contradictory understandings of beauty and the aesthetic:

1. The "idea of beauty," which entails the "completely pure union" of the two contrary (material and formal) impulses (Schiller 2016, 58), as set forth in Schiller's overarching transcendental argument.
2. "Aesthetic culture," which is a collective task empirically (and hence imperfectly) to apply the principles of the transcendental idea of beauty to the composition of artworks and critical judgement in the "arena of actuality" (61).
3. 'Spontaneous' "beauty" or "aesthetic disposition of the soul" that arises from a chance combination of socio-ecological, proto-evolutionary circumstances (99).
4. The 'aesthetic' (comprising variations such as "aesthetic disposition" [*ästhetische Stimmung*], "aesthetic state" [*ästhetischer Zustand*] and "aesthetic state" [*ästhetischer Staat*]), which is a more diffuse and expanded set of arguments mediating between the first three strands, and informed by the republican ideals of equality, liberty and collective self-formation.

Any reading of the letters is thus forced to plot a course through these ambiguities and destined to emphasise one line of argument over another. My own reading, while attempting to remain cognisant of the text's ambiguities, is no different.

The aim of this chapter is to pursue the implications of the aesthetic, not only within Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, but also in the

writings of the 'young' Marx. I aim to read Marx's earliest writings through the lens of Schiller's letters and vice versa. In doing so, I hope to show that Schiller's philosophy enables the recognition of a powerful strand of aesthetic logic within Marx's developing theory of revolution and the state, whilst at the same time, seen retrospectively from the viewpoint of the early Marx, Schiller's letters begin to reveal a hidden 'red thread'. Unlike those 'aesthetic' readings of the young Marx that focus on the importance of the senses and alienation (e.g., Eagleton 1990), however, I ultimately understand the aesthetic in an expanded sense as an immanent modality of hegemony; art, beauty and "aesthetic culture" are thus conceived as moments within a more expansive aesthetic process.[4] The point here is not to trace lines of direct 'influence' from Schiller to Marx, however valid such an approach might be, but rather to enable the writings of each to shed light on those of the other.

Schiller's Letters

There exists within Schiller's letters a radical line of argument which, if pursued to its conclusion, points beyond Schiller's own inherent political limitations. I shall attempt to reconstruct this subversive logic in four stages: his historical criticism of modernity, the theory of the state, an implicit theory of hegemony, and – finally – Schiller's ideal of the "aesthetic state." It should be noted, however, that this operation entails a certain risk. As has been noted, Schiller was acutely aware of the importance of the letter form for his theory of the aesthetic, contrasting it explicitly to "the majority of our scholars [who] are so fearfully buckled into their systems that a somewhat unfamiliar form of

[4] It is, of course, Rancière who has done most to unpick the various configurations of 'art,' 'life' and 'politics' arising from what he takes to be the foundational conjunction of aesthetics: "Schiller says that aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful *and* of the art of living. The entire question of the 'politics of aesthetics' … turns on this short conjunction" (2010, 116; emphasis in original). It would take another article entirely to negotiate the strengths and shortcomings of Rancière's approach, but suffice it to say that this is a quite severely selective reading of Schiller and that its principal category, "aesthetic experience," is problematic given the precise philosophical status of the concept of "experience" within German idealism, not to mention the total absence of the phrase "aesthetic experience" from Schiller's letters, which tend to speak instead of "aesthetic disposition" [*ästhetische Stimmung*] (often as "aesthetic disposition of the soul [*Gemüth*]"), "aesthetic state" [*ästhetischer Zustand*] or "aesthetic state" [*ästhetischer Staat*].

presentation cannot penetrate their triply armoured chests" (2016, 118). By abstracting *theoretical* propositions from the *aesthetic* form of the letter, I am consciously running the risk of "dissolving the necessary bond" between the "elements" of the "secret" of beauty, against which Schiller explicitly warns in his first letter (2016, 4). Nonetheless, the reconstruction of Schiller's argument will ultimately arrive back at its point of departure – the "freer form" of the letter – at which point the theoretical will be 'sublated' within an expanded comprehension of the aesthetic.[5]

In what would become a long line of intellectuals mobilising the image of the organic totality of ancient Greece against the fragmentation of modernity,[6] Schiller bemoans several aspects of modern life. Firstly, "utility" [*der Nutzen*] has become the "great idol of the age, to which all powers are in thrall and all talent must pay homage" (5). Utility signals the predominance of the "material impulse" [*sinnlichen Trieb*] over the "formal impulse" [*Formtrieb*], the two contradictory drives that pull humanity between time, matter, contingency and sensation on the one hand, and eternity, ideas, necessity and freedom on the other.[7] It will be the task of the aesthetic, through the "playful impulse" [*Spieltrieb*], to conjoin the two. The reign of utility is reinforced by egoism: "Egoism has established its system at the heart of the most elaborated sociability, and in the absence of its very own sociable heart we experience all the contagion and affliction of society" (15). Egoism is savagery to the second-degree;[8] having torn itself from the animalistic state of nature, humanity now freely submits to the tyranny of matter at the level of principle. Yet here one encounters a crucial and constitutive ambiguity in Schiller's writing: the aesthetic education of "man" [*Mensch*] concerns at one and the same time individuals and social classes. As noted above, the material and formal

[5] I write 'sublated' with caution since there is a sense in letter eighteen that *Aufhebung* for Schiller denotes a formal logical notion that remains too bound to the formal impulse. He seems to oppose to it the notion of a "completely pure union" (65). I am grateful to Hammam Aldouri for drawing my attention to this distinction.

[6] For a historical and philosophical reconstruction of this intellectual tradition, see Josef Chytry (1989).

[7] The Kantian architectonic is clearly visible here.

[8] Savagery for Schiller denotes a predominance of feelings or the "material impulse" over the "formal impulse"; barabarism denotes the inverse (cf. 2016, 12).

impulses are at once internal to individual "minds" or "souls" and allegorical of entire social classes: "We observe rough and licentious instincts among the lower and more numerous classes" (14) just as "the civilized classes represent the even more repugnant spectacle of lethargy and a depraved character which is all the more disgusting because culture itself [the form-giving force *par excellence*, DH] is its source" (15). Schiller is thus developing a theory of the politicised mutual determination of the senses and reason, which itself is an allegorical figuration of the division between ruler and ruled, intellectual and worker, yet a figuration which is active within the latter oppositions.[9]

This lack of harmony between rulers and ruled is further aggravated by the processes of differentiation, fragmentation and specialisation that occur under the modern division of labour:

> The image of the human species in each of us has been enlarged, shattered and scattered as shards, not in proportioned admixtures; so that one has to go from one individual to another to reconstitute the totality of the species… [I]n practice our faculties express themselves as fragments corresponding to the analytical distinctions of the psychologist; not only individual subjects but entire classes of men realize only part of their endowments, while the remainder remain stunted, leaving hardly a dull trace of themselves. (Schiller, 2016, 18)

Like Marx, Schiller understands the division of labour as historically necessary but profoundly mutilating. His impassioned critiques of utility, egoism and fragmentation converge in a passage that would not be out of place in Marx's early writings:

> The more numerous part of mankind is too tired and exhausted from its struggle with need to gird itself up for a new and more intense struggle against error. Happy to avoid the troublesome effort of thinking, they gladly leave the control of their concepts to others; and

[9] Terry Eagleton (1990, 113) makes a similar point: "Indeed the whole text is a kind of political allegory, in which the troubled relations between sense drive and formal drive, or Nature and reason, are never far from a reflection on the ideal relations between populace and ruling class, or civil society and absolutist state."

> if it so happens that they rouse themselves to higher needs, they seize with greedy credulity upon the formulations that state and priesthood have prepared for them in anticipation. If these unhappy souls deserve our sympathy, we are justified in despising those whom fortune has freed from the yoke of need, but who nonetheless choose to bend themselves to it. (27)

The radical potential of this passage lies, as will become clear, in its interconnection of labour, philosophy, class and the state. Schiller's aesthetic ideal, which "will combine the most abundant existence with the greatest autonomy and liberty" (47), would seem to presuppose an alleviation of economic exploitation combined with the development of – to risk an anachronism – organic intellectuals capable of leading the workers from error to truth, a task the state and priesthood are too corrupt to fulfil.

Yet the true radicalism of Schiller's position, glimpsed here *in nuce*, only fully emerges in his comments on the state. It is well known that Schiller's letters condemn the authoritarian excesses of the state, whereby form is violently imposed upon a recalcitrant nature; he notes that "the constitution of a state will be very incomplete if it can bring about unity only by suppressing diversity" (11).[10] It was this that led Terry Eagleton to argue that Schiller's theory of the aesthetic is, effectively, a theory of Gramscian hegemony, whereby 'hegemony' is understood as rule by consensus rather than coercion. Yet a different reading is also possible, based on a closer engagement with the minutiae of Schiller's argument and an alternative understanding of hegemony.[11] Schiller writes that "every individual carries within himself … a purely ideal man" (10) and that this "pure man … is represented by [or through, *durch* – DH] the state" (11). He continues:

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[10] In an article on aesthetics in German republicanism, Douglas Moggach has argued that "[t]he central political question for Schiller is the attainment of a unity that is compatible with difference, and that is brought about by spontaneous self-determination rather than by forcible imposition" (2016, 314).

[11] The latter is afforded by a major work of recent Gramsci scholarship: Peter D. Thomas' *The Gramscian Moment* (2009).

> But since the state should be an organization that creates [or forms/ educates – *bildet*] itself through itself for itself, it can only become actual to the extent that the parts have been attuned [or have attuned themselves] to the idea of the whole. Because the state represents the pure and objective humanity in the hearts of its citizens, it will have to observe with respect to its citizens the same relationship as each has to himself, and will be able to honour their subjective humanity only to the extent that it is refined into objective humanity.[12] (13; translation modified)

That the state should *form* and *educate* itself through itself for itself, immediately throws into doubt the traditional enlightenment hierarchy of (labouring) masses led to truth by (thinking) intellectuals. It is thus plausible to interpret the aesthetic as an immanent modality of 'hegemony,' but only if one understands the latter not as 'class rule through consensus' but as a process of mass self-education and collective intellectuality that Gramsci would come to identify with the figures of the organic intellectual and the "democratic philosopher" (Thomas, 2009, 429-436). This mass self-formation is not only intellectual but also pertains to aesthetic form, an insight whose political stakes become clear in Marx's early writings on Prussian press censorship. Ultimately, the state for Schiller can only become actual to the extent that its citizens have formed and educated themselves in the Idea of the whole; to the extent that this is not so, the state will impose itself from above as a violent abstraction.

It is here that Schiller can be seen as an inheritor of Machiavelli's modern republicanism and a forerunner of the young Marx's critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state. By reversing the classical priority of form over event, Machiavelli emphasised the active, formative role of subjectivity in

[12] "Aber eben deswegen, weil der Staat eine Organisation seyn soll, die sich durch sich selbst und für sich selbst bildet, so kann er auch nur in so ferne wirklich werden, als sich die Theile zur Idee des Ganzen hinauf gestimmt haben. Weil der Staat der reinen und objektiven Menschheit in der Brust seiner Bürger zum Repräsentanten dient, so wird er gegen seine Bürger dasselbe Verhältniß zu beobachten haben, in welchem sie zu sich selber stehen, und ihre subjektive Menschheit auch nur in *dem* Grade ehren können, als sie zur objektiven veredelt ist" (Schiller, 2000, 17).

relation to the contingencies afforded by historical circumstance.[13] In doing so, he transformed *virtù* into an impetuous, innovative, formative activity; it now named a self-organization of material and bodily expressions that became the ontological basis of his republicanism.[14] Schiller, along with German republicanism in general, inherited this emphasis on collective self-organisation, particularly as it relates to aesthetic form. The beautiful form, "a symbol of republican freedom," is "flexible and spontaneous, describing the movements of the particulars who generate it … sustained by their own cooperation" (Moggach 2016, 315). It is precisely this line of aesthetic republicanism that Marx himself will employ to criticise Hegel's doctrine of the state:

> In monarchy, the whole, the people, is subsumed under one of its forms of existence, the political constitution; in democracy the *constitution itself* appears only as *one* determining characteristic of the people, and indeed as its self-determination … The constitution is in appearance what it is in reality: the free creation of man. (Marx 1975 [1843], 87; emphasis in original)

This same logic of aesthetic self-organisation informs both Marx's earlier writings on press censorship (as we shall see) and Schiller's theory of the aesthetic state. As a process of intellectual and practical self-formation it is integral to the struggle for hegemony.

To return now to Schiller, the second sentence in the previously quoted passage (Schiller 2016, 13) instigates a crucial and recurring line of thought throughout the letters. If the state is "to observe with respect to its citizens the same relationship as each has to himself" then the ideal state would be one in which representation has become so attenuated as to coincide with the minimal representational mediation necessary for one to relate to oneself. Indeed, representation in general gives rise to a constant risk of political abstraction:

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[13] See the introduction to the present volume and Vatter (2000).
[14] Again, see the introduction to the present volume.

> Forced to deal with the diversity of its citizens through their classification, experiencing humanity only through representation, hence at second hand, the governor entirely loses contact with humanity [*verliert der regierende Theil sie zuletzt ganz und gar aus den Augen*], taking it for a mere construct of the intellect, while the governed are in turn indifferent [*mit Kaltsinn*] to laws that barely relate to them (Schiller, 2016, 20).

Yet if the state is to become coextensive with citizens' self-relation, what form does this relation assume? Since for Schiller each citizen consists of both an absolute "I" or "person" and an empirical "I" or "individual" (a precursor of Marx's "On the Jewish Question"), the (noumenal) person, to become actual, must determinately realise itself through time in a specific (phenomenal) situation:[15] "It is only in the sequence of his ideas that the persisting I itself becomes manifested to itself [*Nur durch die Folge seiner Vorstellungen wird das beharrliche Ich sich selbst zur Erscheinung*]" (39). Consequently, either the state must relate to its citizens *in analogy* to the way in which citizens relate to themselves through the sequence of ideas or – pushing Schiller's logic further – the state as 'representative' of the pure I in each citizen could be understood as providing the ideas through which each citizen mediates her relationship to herself – with Schiller becoming an incipient theorist of ideology.

The ideal state would be one in which the aesthetic process of mass self-education and self-formation renders unnecessary the abstraction of representation beyond what is necessary for citizens' self-relation. Yet, as we have seen, because of utility, egoism, and the division of labour, "[t]he more numerous part of mankind is too tired and exhausted from its struggle with need to gird itself up for a new and more intense struggle against error" (27). Consequently, the "sequence of ideas" through which each citizen relates to herself is too erroneous to enable full self-manifestation; error arises from the lack of physical, moral, and theoretical vitality of the ruling class which exploits

[15] As Beiser remarks, "[h]ere Schiller follows Fichte and breaks decisively (if silently) with Kant, he is virtually saying that the Kantian noumenal self exists only in and through its determinate phenomenal manifestations" (2005, 138).

workers' exhaustion to maintain its hegemony (hegemony being always a relation of pedagogy). In a sentence reminiscent of E.IV.p1 of Spinoza's *Ethics* ("*Nothing positive which a false idea has is removed by the presence of the true insofar as it is true*" (Spinoza, 1996, 117; emphasis in original)), Schiller bemoans the fact that the existence of Enlightenment reason has done nothing to dispel the deathly pall of error: "If truth is to prevail in battle it must itself first become a *force*, establishing an *impelling force* as its champion in the realm of appearances" (26). This "force" will combine elements of both drives: the material impulse and the formal impulse. "Graced" by form but in touch with life, such a persona "enlivens all acquaintances, in his worldly affairs steers all towards his own intentions" (34): the aesthetic can thus be read as an immanent modality of hegemony.

If the driving force of the aesthetic is the "playful impulse," its principal faculty is imagination. The imagination is the human equivalent of an energetic surplus in nature itself (cf. 106-107); its "whole charm" consists "in an unforced association of images [*ungezwungene Folge von Bildern*]" and the "play of *freely associated ideas* [*Spiel der freyen Ideenfolge*]" (107; emphasis in original). If it is "only in the sequence of his ideas that the persisting I itself becomes manifested to itself" (39), and if the ideal state is one which *coincides* with this self-relation, then human liberation is only possible when the state itself embodies free association. Given Schiller's tendency to allegorical figuration, free association must be understood as at once the individual capacity for joyful, unrestrained concatenation of images and thoughts, as well as collective assemblies of bodies and minds freely exchanging ideas, forms and images with no censorious intervention from an abstract state. Yet "freely associated ideas" are still, within Schiller's schema, residually connected to the material impulse; true aesthetic freedom must "[attempt] to find *a free form*" (107; emphasis in original). It is at this point that we return to the beginning: the epistolary form.

Schiller sets out an array of sometimes puzzling preconditions for the advent of the aesthetic state. It requires: a socio-historical situation, arising out of contingency, which fuses sedentary, introspective individuality with

nomadic, centrifugal collectivity (99); an alleviation of immediate physical need (27, 100, 132–3); and the developed physiological receptivity of an aesthetically disposed eye and ear (101). These preconditions combine in the primal scene of the aesthetic: "[Man's] tender beauty will bud only when he speaks silently to himself in his hut and, as soon as he comes out, speaks with all of his kind [*da allein, wo er in eigener Hütte still mit sich selbst, und sobald er heraustritt, mit dem ganzen Geschlechte spricht, wird sich ihre liebliche Knospe entfalten*]" (99; translation modified). A dialectic is thus produced between the "sequence of ideas" through which each person becomes individually manifested to herself, and the public and universal "free association" of ideas through collective debate and encounters (of which, from Marx's perspective, a free press and the right to free assembly are historical pre-conditions).[16] "[O]nly aesthetic communication unites society," writes Schiller, "because it is based upon what is shared in common" (111). The letter form was the "freer form" (117) through which Schiller could speak to himself and to the public simultaneously. For the young Marx, the newspaper would assume a similar function; and by the time of "The Civil War in France" (1871) it would be the Paris commune that signalled "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour" (Marx, 1974, 212). "It is only beauty," writes Schiller, "that we enjoy as individual and genus, as *representatives* of the genus." The aesthetic can thus be seen as a modality of hegemony, inscribed in a free, generic form in which individuals actualise themselves only through the full actualisation of the genus itself.

[16] Cf. Gramsci on the historical preconditions of the "democratic philosopher": "The environment reacts back on the philosopher and imposes on him a continual process of self-criticism, functioning as 'teacher'. This is why one of the most important demands that the modern intelligentsias have made in the political field has been that of the so-called 'freedom of thought and of the expression of thought' ('freedom of the press', 'freedom of association'). For the relationship between master and disciple in the general sense referred to above is only realised where this political condition exists, and only then do we get the 'historical' realisation of a new type of philosopher, whom we could call a 'democratic philosopher' in the sense that he is a philosopher convinced that his personality is not limited to himself as a physical individual but is an active social relationship of modification of the cultural environment" (Gramsci, 1971, 350).

Marx's early writings share this concern with the actualisation of the genus.[18] What Marx seems to call for in these early texts is for human beings to become what they properly are. What we are in the young Marx's eyes is productive, rational, social animals.[19] These four attributes ('animality', taken from the subject 'animal', being the fourth) form the basis of human labour. This differs from mere animal activity in that it is universal (as opposed to unilateral), consciously undertaken (as opposed to instinctively performed), free (in that it can become an end-in-itself) and world-fashioning (in the sense that man's natural history is a dialectical pole of human history as such).[20] For Marx, labour is the constitutive life-activity of man, life-activity being what is determinate of a given genus.[21] This means that man is a *Gattungswesen*, a species-being, not only in the sense that all humans belong naturalistically to the same genus,[22] but also in the sense that what is universal to all human beings is precisely universality itself (Chitty, 2009, 128). Human labour is both internally and externally universal: it can be applied to any object at all (such

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[17] This section is a lightly adapted version of sub-chapters 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 of Hartley (2017), reproduced here with the kind permission of Brill.

[18] The best selection of these early writings in English remains Marx (1975c).

[19] Note the Aristotelian analogues of these terms: *poiēsis* (production), *zōon logon echon* (animal 'having' language/ discourse) and *zōon politikon* (political animal). Nonetheless, it is also quite possible to see Marx's conception of praxis and species-being as completely at odds with Aristotle's understanding of a fixed human essence. See, for example, Margolis (1992).

[20] Adapted from Chitty (2009, 133).

[21] It goes without saying that Marx's early, predominantly anthropological theory of human labour is a controversial one. It has given rise to two interconnected debates among its interpreters: the first concerns a so-called 'break' which occurs between the early and the mature Marx, from an initial anthropological focus on 'human nature' to a purely relational conception in which 'human nature' is rearticulated as the structural ensemble of social relations. The main progenitor of this line of thought was, of course, Louis Althusser (2005). The second issue concerns Marx's theory of labour itself. Moishe Postone identifies two opposing interpretations which have produced 'two fundamentally different modes of critical analysis: a critique of capitalism *from the standpoint* of labor, on the one hand, and a critique *of* labor, on the other' (Postone, 1993, 5). The former assumes that labour is transhistorical whereas the latter identifies labour under capitalism as historically specific. In the first, labour is the *subject* of the critique of capitalist society, whilst in the latter it is the *object*. More recently, Jason Read has argued that both interpretations miss the point: 'The opposition between these two critical strategies generally assumes that labor itself is one-sided, thus forgetting the duality of labor. An examination of the relationship between abstract and living labor makes possible a criticism in which labor is both the object, in the sense that it is a criticism of the apparatuses and structures that constitute abstract labor, and the subject, in the sense that it places the potentiality of labor at the center of this critique' (Read, 2003, 77).

[22] This is one of the aspects of Feuerbach's thought which Marx criticises in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach: "Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as 'genus,' as an internal, dumb generality which *naturally* unites the many individuals" (Marx, 1975c, 423).

that man "makes the whole of nature his inorganic body" (Marx, 1975c, 328)) and it is oriented to the human species as a whole, for it produces goods that in principle any human being could use (Chitty, 2011, 485).

As it stands, however, man is currently unable to realise his own *Gattungswesen*: theoretically, he *is* a species-being, but is unable to activate this theory in practice. According to Marx, what prevents this realisation is alienation, a situation in which some (implicitly undesirable) third party intervenes between man and his essence as human. Joseph Margolis summarises this well: "man is alienated [for Marx] insofar as he fails to grasp that his own nature and the world's (the world in which his labor – his praxis – is effective) are the *products of his praxis*, through history" (Margolis, 1992, 337).[23] The archetypal form of alienation is religion (since God is the ultimate mediator between man and his essence),[24] but economic alienation is fundamental (especially in the form of the commodity, which masks the social relations of its production).[25] For our purposes, however, the most significant form of alienation discussed in the early writings is political.[26] The very existence of a political state, Marx claims, is already a sign of a cleavage between civil and political society: "the sphere in which man behaves as a communal being [*Gemeinwesen*] is degraded to a level below the sphere in which he behaves as a partial being … it is man as *bourgeois*, i.e. as a member of civil society, and not man as citizen who is taken as the *real* and *authentic* man" (1975c, 23). The consequence of this is a disjunction, as in Schiller, between sensuous content and abstract political form, between "man in his sensuous, individual and *immediate* existence" and "man as an *allegorical*, *moral* person" (ibid., 234). The form of the state hangs loosely on the body politic like a badly

[23] There is, however, a problem with Margolis' phrasing to the extent that it implies that man is alienated for primarily *epistemological* reasons; alienation is produced practically within the very process of production under the conditions of capitalistic private property: "grasping" this fact will not practically resolve it, since it is a "socially necessary illusion."

[24] Cf. Feuerbach (1989, 153): "God is the concept of the species as an individual … he is the species-concept, the species-essence conceived immediately as an existence, a singular being [*Einzelwesen*]."

[25] Both religious and economic alienation are structured by the logic of the fetish. The commodity form – and capitalist private property more generally – conceals the four types of economic alienation Marx famously identified in the 1844 manuscripts: man's alienation from the product of his labour, from his labour itself, from his species, and from his fellow men.

[26] This is obviously not to say that religious and economic alienation are not indirectly political.

fitting toga. True human emancipation, which Marx will come to know as "socialism," would entail the return of man's essence unto himself, the destruction of the mediator, and the reharmonising of form and content. In a passage reminiscent of Schiller's aesthetic state, Marx writes: "Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, his individual work and his relationships … only then will human emancipation be completed" (ibid.). In this light, one might say that if Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach called for the realisation of philosophy in praxis, then "On the Jewish Question" offers a vision of Schillerian actualisation.

Central to Marx's analyses here – especially in his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* (1843), which prepared the theoretical ground for "On the Jewish Question" – is a theory of the modern state: "The abstraction of the *state as such* was not born until the modern world because the abstraction of private life was not created until modern times. The abstraction of the *political state* is a modern product" (Marx, 1975c, 90). He contrasts the modern situation with that of the Middle Ages, in which "the life of the people was identical with the life of the state [i.e., political life]" (ibid.). As Lucio Colletti observes, "[p]olitics [in the Middle Ages] adhered so closely to the economic structure that socio-economic distinctions (serf and lord) were also political distinctions (subject and sovereign)" ("Introduction" to Marx, 1975c, 34). Likewise, Marx also contrasts the modern state with the Greek *polis* in which "the political state as such was the only true content of their [the citizens'] lives and their aspirations" (1975c, 91). According to the young Marx, then, it is only in modernity that the political realm becomes abstracted from the life of the people as a particular reality over and above their daily existence.

It is against this dual backdrop – that of Marx's early writings on the state and Schiller's theory of the aesthetic – that we should read the first newspaper article Marx ever wrote, "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction" (1842). At the time, Friedrich Wilhelm IV had begun his reign by ostensibly relaxing censorship laws, only to find himself subsequently

incapable of controlling the liberal dissent he thereby unleashed.[27] To counteract this wave of agitation, he promulgated new censorship instructions, effectively clamping down on his own liberalisations. One of the decrees of the new censorship instructions was that "censorship should not prevent serious and modest investigation of truth."[28] Marx responded to this restriction on the very style of journalistic writing with an argument which goes to the heart of his simultaneously aesthetic and political opposition to censorship:

> [T]ruth is general, it does not belong to me alone, it belongs to all, it owns me, I do not own it. My property is the *form*, which is my spiritual individuality. *Le style c'est l'homme*. Yes, indeed! The law permits me to write, only I must write in a style that is not *mine*! I may show my spiritual countenance, but I must first set it in the *prescribed folds*! What man of honour will not blush at this presumption and not prefer to hide his head under the toga? Under the toga at least one has an inkling of a Jupiter's head. The prescribed folds mean nothing but *bonne mine à mauvais jeu*. (Marx, 1975b, 112)
>
> [[D]ie Wahrheit ist allgemein, sie gehört nicht mir, sie gehört Allen, sie hat mich, ich habe sie nicht. Mein Eigenthum ist die *Form*, sie ist meine geistige Individualität. Le style c'est l'homme. Und wie! Das Gesetz gestattet, daß ich schreiben soll, nur soll ich einen anderen als *meinen* Styl schreiben! Ich darf das Gesicht meines Geistes zeigen, aber ich muß es vorher in *vorgeschriebene Falten* legen! Welcher Mann von Ehre wird nicht erröthen über diese Zumuthung und nicht lieber sein Haupt unter der Toga verbergen? Wenigstens läßt die Toga einen Jupiterkopf ahnen. Die vorgeschriebenen Falten heißen nichts als: bonne mine à mauvais jeu. (Marx, 1975a, 100)]

At first glance, it would be easy to read this passage as indicative of Marx's early Romanticism: the outrage of the poet-radical at an attempt to curb the individual creative genius, to set it in prescribed folds – the fury of a

[27] I am basing this account on Rose (1978, 15–32).
[28] This is a quotation from the original censorship instruction, cited in Marx (1975b, 111).

Prometheus bound. There is certainly something in that reading, but a closer analysis reveals a coherent theory of style that links, not only to the central aspects of Marx's early writings outlined above, but also to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of authorship and copyright.

Firstly, he claims that truth is universal; it is only the *form* which is my individual property, my spiritual individuality. Next follows a series of conceptual and idiomatic puns on style as an individual's spiritual face, countenance or visage – in other words, style as the physiognomy of an individual writer, indicative of his inner being (Schiller's "person"). What the state is trying to do, Marx suggests, is to force the writer to screw his face into an alien pose. The German here is *vorgeschriebene Falten*, which literally means "prescribed folds," but which, in the idiomatic phrase *mein Gesicht in Falten legen*, has another primary sense of "frowning pensively," drawing as it does on the meaning of *Falte* as "wrinkle."[29] At this point, Marx claims that it would be better to hide one's head beneath a toga than contort one's spiritual countenance into a state-decreed rictus. The issue of style and censorship reproduces on a smaller scale the larger problem of the political state as such: the state enforces the merely *abstract* universality of the legal person onto the authentic, sensuous individual. A "freer form" of association (to quote Schiller) – one in keeping with the inherent sociality of man's species-being – would enable a type of individual stylistic expression whose limits were self-willed rather than externally imposed. That is to say, Marx does not seem to be calling for some spontaneous Romantic formlessness, but rather for a form of collective aesthetic self-regulation: a stylistic concrete universal in which the styles through which humans articulate what Schiller called the "sequence of ideas" through which they manifest themselves arise organically through common and free association.

[29] It is no coincidence that Schiller's artistic ideal is the *Juno Ludovisi*: "[the Greeks] banished from the brow of the blessed gods all the gravity and labour that furrow the cheeks of mortals, together with all those frivolous pleasures that smooth empty faces, freed those who were eternally content from the fetters of any purpose, any obligation, any cares, making *idleness* and *indifference* the envied lot of the gods: simply a more humane name for the freest, most sublime being" (Schiller 2016, 57).

This argument takes on new light in the context of nascent eighteenth-century theories of copyright law. In the passage cited above, Marx (mis)quotes Buffon's well-known phrase, *Le style est l'homme même* [(the) style is (the) man himself]. This dictum is usually taken to mean that style reflects personality, but in fact its meaning is somewhat different.[30] It occurred in the context of Buffon's inaugural 1753 address to the French Academy. Buffon informed his fellow *immortels* that facts, knowledge and discoveries were external to man, the common property of all. They were, he said, appropriable, liable to transportation and alteration:

> Only those works which are well written will pass into posterity … if they are written without taste, without nobility and without genius, they will perish, because knowledge, facts and discoveries are easily appropriable; they travel and even gain from being put to work by more skilful hands. These things are outside of man; style is man himself. Thus, style cannot be appropriated, nor transported, nor altered: if it is elevated, noble, sublime, the author will be equally admired in all ages; because truth alone is durable, even eternal.[31]
>
> [Les ouvrages bien écrits seront les seuls qui passeront à la postérité … s'ils sont écrits sans goût, sans noblesse et sans génie, ils périront, parce que les connaissances, les faits et les découvertes s'enlèvent aisément, se transportent et gagnent même à être mises en oeuvre par des mains plus habiles. Ces choses sont hors de l'homme, le style est l'homme même: le style ne peut donc ni s'enlever, ni se transporter, ni s'altérer: s'il est élevé, noble, sublime, l'auteur sera également admiré dans tous les temps; car il n'y a que la vérité qui soit durable et même éternelle. (Buffon, 1853, 330)]

Style, then, as opposed to knowledge, facts and discoveries, is immutable, immovable and immortal. Style is the man himself; it is, one might say, his

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[30] M. H. Abrams (1953, 373, n. 13) has noted this misunderstanding.
[31] My own translation of the French passage cited directly below.

property, the proper of man: like Schiller's notion of the "person," it cannot be expropriated, it never changes and it never differs.

In 1753, however, these philosophical pronouncements on style had not yet been codified into law. It was only Fichte's intervention into late eighteenth-century German copyright disputes that enabled this to happen. At the time, piracy was rife, and there was still no unified pan-Germanic legal system or rationale to deal with it.[32] The very notion of the author as legal proprietor was still in the process of being born. It was in the context of these simultaneously economic and aesthetic debates that in 1793 Fichte wrote his essay, "Proof of the Illegality of Reprinting." He begins by distinguishing between the physical [*körperlich*] and intellectual [*geistig*] aspects of a book (Fichte in Mayeda, 2008, 173–4).[33] The physical refers to the printed paper. The intellectual can be further subdivided into its material [*materielle*] aspect – the ideas communicated, or the ideational content – and its formal aspect – the *style* in which these ideas are presented. By defining rightful ownership as when the expropriation of a thing by others is physically impossible, Fichte declares that when a book is sold ownership of the physical object and its ideal content passes to the buyer.[34] The *form* of this ideational content, however, remains eternally the author's own:

> [T]hat which can simply never be appropriated by anyone, since it is physically impossible, is the *form* of the thoughts, the connections between ideas, and the signs by means of which ideas are presented. Each person has his own manner of thinking, and his own unique way of forming concepts and connecting them. (Fichte in Mayeda, 2008, 176)

Whilst Fichte does briefly attempt to distinguish form from "manner" [*Manier*] (2008, 177), it is quite clear that his own understanding of 'form' is very similar

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[32] For the historical background I rely heavily on Woodmansee (1984).

[33] Mayeda's commentary includes a full translation of Fichte's article, with the German and English in parallel columns: cf. Fichte in Mayeda (2008, 171–98). This is the source of my quotations from Fichte.

[34] Whereas in terms of the physical object, the author cedes all proprietary rights to the buyer on purchase, in terms of ideas the author remains a co-proprietor (Fichte in Mayeda, 2008, 175–6).

to Buffon's notion of 'style': that which is proper to each individual. Fichte thus provided the rational grounds for literary ownership and authorship and, at the same time, for the illegality of piracy; he did so by *privatising* that which in Schiller remains the very point of intersection between the person and the commons: "the sequence of ideas" or "freely associated ideas." In doing so, he helped fundamentally to alter the understanding of what a writer was: no longer the patronised, neo-classical imitator of nature, but an *Urheber*, an originator and creator.[35]

If we now return to Marx's article on censorship, we see it in a whole new light. This is not – or not *only* – Marx the Romantic, chafing at the bit of mundane restrictions on individual creation. On the contrary, when Marx states that a man's style is his property he means it quite literally. State censorship is a form of expropriation: the expropriation of form, of individual property. As Margaret Rose has observed (Rose, 1978, 29), in attempting to confer its identity upon its citizens, the state has succeeded only in expropriating them of their own identity – of that which is *proper* to them. So we are left in somewhat of a quandary: the very Romantic theory of the author as unique, individual originator developed partly because of the very system of private property that Marx used it to criticise. Just as Marx attacked Proudhon for declaring that "Property is theft!", since the concept of theft presupposes private property (Marx and Engels, 1956, 128), so Marx's attack on the censors for forcibly expropriating the formal property of man presupposes an individual with property rights. In attempting to stress the inner contradictions of the bourgeois state, Marx in a sense falls short of the implicit radicalism of Schiller's aesthetic commons, since the latter would entail the rejection, not only of the state's violent abstractions, but also of the privatisation of the stylistic commons effected by copyright law.

Wood-Theft and the Commons

[35] Woodmansee (1984) deals with this aspect in great detail.

In his article on "Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood" (1842), however, Marx was very much aware of the privatisation of the commons, and developed a profoundly Schillerian critique of the criminalisation of wood-gathering. Once a customary right of peasants, the gathering of dead wood on residual common land was increasingly being penalised as theft. Traditionally, such gathering had been unrestricted but the scarcities caused by the agrarian crises of the 1820s and the increase in industrialisation, beginning in earnest in the following decade, led to severe legal controls: during this period five-sixths of all prosecutions in Prussia dealt with wood (McLellan 1976, 56). The gathering of dead wood was now treated as harshly as the cutting down and theft of living timber. In some cases, 'thieves' were compelled to carry out forced labour for forest owners.

What is significant about Marx's biting articles on this topic is that his disgust at the profound injustice of these laws is inextricable from a critique of private interest and the state that is articulated in surprisingly Schillerian terms. Broadly speaking, Marx attacks private interest on three levels: ontology, character and logic. When subordinated to private interest the state becomes incapable of subtle differentiations of being:

> The gathering of fallen wood and the theft of wood are therefore essentially different things. The objects concerned are different, the actions in regard to them are no less different; hence the frame of mind must also be different, for what objective standard can be applied to the frame of mind other than the content of the action and its form? But, in spite of this essential difference, you call both of them theft and punish both of them as theft. (Marx, 1975d, 227)

Just as Schiller had warned that "the constitution of a state will be very incomplete if it can bring about unity only by suppressing diversity" (2016, 11), so the power of private interest has led the Prussian state intentionally to suppress ontological distinctions. Private interest has the capacity violently to simplify the world:

> [interest] makes the one point where the passer-by comes into contact with him into the only point where the very nature of this man comes into contact with the world. But a man may very well happen to tread on my corns without on that account ceasing to be an honest, indeed an excellent, man. Just as you must not judge people by your corns, you must not see them through the eyes of your private interest. (235-6)

Existential variety and multiplicity of being is violently suppressed. Consequently, in subordinating itself to interest, the state becomes incapable of "observ[ing] with respect to its citizens the same relationship as each has to himself" (Schiller, 2016, 13); on the contrary, Marx explicitly notes that interest "do[es] not look at a thing in relation to itself" (1975d, 248). In Schillerian terms, interest thus prevents the true actualisation of the state.

Marx's second line of attack concerns character, a recurring theme throughout Schiller's letters.[36] Private interest, writes Marx, has a "petty, wooden, mean and selfish soul" (235). If the state subordinates itself to private interest, it limits its own moral, practical and affective scope:

> This claim on the part of private interest, the paltry soul of which was never illuminated and thrilled by thought of the state, is a serious and sound lesson for the latter. If the state, even in a single respect, stoops so low as to act in the manner of private property instead of in its own way, the immediate consequence is that it has to adapt itself in the form of its means to the narrow limits of private property. (241)

This concern with character and soul is integral to the young Marx's developing theory of revolution.[37] Just as Schiller had claimed that he who successfully combines matter and form "enlivens all acquaintances, in his worldly affairs steers all towards his own intentions" (2016, 34), so Marx suggests that *magnanimity* is a precondition of hegemony. Likewise, just as Schiller had bemoaned the paltry soul of the "civilized classes," those who

[36] See especially letters three and four.
[37] The best account of this theory is Löwy (2005).

failed to follow Kant and Horace's dictum (*sapere aude!*) and dare to use their understanding, so the young Marx gradually came to understand that no "particular class" in Germany – especially the bourgeoisie – was capable of becoming a revolutionary force by uniting the whole of society behind it through "a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses":

> in Germany every particular class lacks not only the consistency, acuteness, courage and ruthlessness which would stamp it as the negative representative of society; equally, all classes lack that breadth of spirit which identifies itself, if only for a moment, with the spirit of the people, that genius which can raise material force to the level of political power, that revolutionary boldness which flings into the face of its adversary the defiant words: *I am nothing and should be everything*. The main feature of German morality and honour, not only in individuals but in classes, is that *modest egoism* which asserts its narrowness and allows that narrowness to be used against it. (Marx, 1975, 254-5)

Thus, for both Schiller and Marx, magnanimity and an expansive vitality are integral to winning hegemony. If for Schiller it was only the aesthetic that was capable of combining philosophical rigour, moral audacity, and affective vivacity, for the young Marx it became the proletariat: "Philosophy cannot realise itself without the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of philosophy" (1975, 257).

Marx's final line of attack on private interest was its total disregard for logic: "it is not concerned about contradictions, for it never comes into contradiction with itself. It is a constant improviser, for it has no system, only *expedients*" (1975d, 247). Expediency is what happens to logic under the gravitational pull of money. Where a philosophical system presupposes internal logical coherence, according to laws of non-contradiction, interest is a *bricoleur* of reason, cobbling together *ad hoc* positions on the basis of whatever happens to be necessary to make a profit. Seen in light of the previous criticisms, it can

be concluded that Marx's contempt for private interest is total: interest subordinates the universal state, the supposed embodiment of man's species-being, to petty materialist egoism; it violently suppresses ontological multiplicity; it prevents the magnanimity of character necessary for revolutionary hegemony; and it negates conceptual rigour. It does all of this to the end of dispossessing German peasants of one of their sole means of survival.

Conclusion: For an Aesthetic Commons

What emerges from this reading of Schiller's letters in light of Marx's early writings (and vice versa) is a radical Schiller and a young Schillerian radical. Their respective, often vituperative, critiques of the abstract, authoritarian state and the petty egoism of private interest are remarkably similar in certain key respects. Likewise, their visions of collective self-realisation have much in common. Schiller's aesthetic ideal combines "the most abundant existence with the greatest autonomy and liberty" in a state which is nothing other than the everyday practice of free association inscribed in "free forms" whose law is "*to give freedom by means of freedom*" (2016, 110; emphasis in original). Marx envisaged an association of free and equal producers in a society that "produces man in all the richness of his being" (1975c, 354) who "has become a *species-being* in his empirical life" (ibid., 234).[38] Both Schiller and Marx saw aesthetic forms as integral to the realisation of these visions. Schiller's claim that it is "only in the sequence of his ideas that the persisting I itself becomes manifested to itself," seen in light of Marx's writings on censorship, as well as eighteenth-century copyright law, points to the political necessity of defending or constructing an aesthetic commons: a press free from state censorship and subordination to capital, the freedom of association to enable joyful bodily and intellectual encounters (a precondition of hegemony), and a commonwealth of forms that are the collective product of writers and artists speaking to themselves in the language of the whole.

[38] Cf. Hartle's chapter in the present volume.

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